

BUDDHISM, WORLD PEACE AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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Introduction

Believers of different faiths now meet, discuss, debate and live together, and they have understood that none could live independently, but depending upon each other, because of the globalized conditions existing, accepting and prevailing. Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other faiths with their population spread to other countries exercise influence in social, economic, political and other conditions¹ of the global society. With the Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG), more and more TNCs / MNCs started spreading in different countries. Incidentally, some of the Chinese, Japanese, Korean and SEA countries, particularly, Thailand companies have been significantly owned by Buddhists or having affiliations with Buddhist organizations, the Buddhist influence felt has been remarkable. Buddhism had been a world religion about 2500 YBP and now also continues to have such status. Thus, the role of Buddhism in dialogue to bring consensus among the believers for global peace is imperative, mandatory and initiated.

Dialogue not New for Eastern Religions

As one thinks or tries to get view because of the Christian over-emphasize² about dialogue subsequent to the Vatican Council-II, it is not that such dialogue started now³, but it has been an Indian tradition, thus, has been part of the eastern religions. Traditional Indian has to learn “Tarkka” as a part of his academic curriculum, as such methodology is useful for all subjects. Though

“Tarkka” can be translated as debate, argument, deliberation, examination, consideration, analysis, synthesis and so on, it comprises all and more than such resultant conglomeration. The competent experts come forward for such a “Tarkka” in front of learned elders and Pundits on a specific topic. In such tarkka, the defeated or losers were never considered as so, but honoured. With the rise of Buddhism, the tarkka was used to win over converts. Buddhists take Buddha himself as a role-model for dialogue as Buddha debated with many and converted many⁴ in his life time.

Buddhists “Dialogue” with Others

With the participation of SEA countries in India through LPG processes, there have been sizable companies dealing with automobile components, electronic goods, chemicals and aquaculture. As Yasutomo Sawahata⁵ pointed out that the activities of the Lay Buddhist organizations have been active in India at several states, particularly, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarpradesh. They have targeted SCs to get converted to Buddhism through dialogue. Japan, Korean, Thailand and Chinese companies have been funding such activities. There have been small players from the SC organizations in other states vigorously engaged in such dialogue processes. They present Buddhism as the suitable religion for world peace and harmony. In 1965, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Nikkyo Niwano, was invited as a Buddhist to meet Pope John Paul VI and the Pope responded, “Christians shall pray for Buddhists and Buddhists shall pray for Christians from now onwards. Otherwise, there will be no way for religions to contribute.

The Buddhist View of Inter-religious Dialogue

Masao Abe⁶ deals with the Buddhist view of inter-religious dialogue as follows:

1. The historical Buddhist attitude toward other religions.
2. Doctrinal and practical basis for inter-religious dialogue.
3. His own view of the Buddhist attitude toward inter-religious dialogue today.

Since Buddha, the attitude of Buddhists to other religions has been receptive, accommodative and peace-abiding. Though Buddhism does not have any idea of one God or special revelation, Buddhist thinking goes beyond the duality of absolute and relative into the experience of emptiness, sameness, and non-ego. “Difference as it is” is sameness and “sameness as it is” is difference, as Buddhism takes the standpoint of no standpoint⁷.

Buddha as Role-model, the Archetype of “Dialoguer”

Mattanando Bhikku has dealt with the issue of Buddhist perspective of inter-religious dialogue and the technique to be adopted. In fact, the technique to be adopted is nothing but the same one, as Buddha used in his days with Vedic followers and it was nothing but inter-religious dialogue. Thus, he claims that Buddha introduced the art of dialogue of the world before Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and all other Hellenistic philosophers⁸. Though Buddha differed with Vedic principles, he never rejected them outright, but proved himself as a teacher of Vedic seers who was capable to show the way of a Brahmin born in the society to be a real Brahmin. Many technical terms⁹ have been adopted from the Vedic/Brahmanical religion in the Buddhist philosophy, liturgy and practices¹⁰. Interestingly, Ambedkar gives a critical methodology in applying Buddhist principle in dialogue. In his critical analysis of Buddhism, after much puzzling and baffling, he raises the following questions to clarify the readers¹¹:

Questions raised	His explanation
1. Why did the Buddha take Parivraja?	That Buddha took Parivraja after seeing a dead person, a sick person and an old person is absurd on the face of it.
2. The problem created by the four Aryan truths.	The four Aryan Truths are a great stumbling block in the way of non-Buddhists accepting the gospel of Buddhism.

3. The doctrines of soul, karma and rebirth.

4. The problem relating to Bikku.

Denying the soul, but accepting karma and rebirth has been a terrible contradiction that needs to be solved.

Whether a Bikku is a perfect person or social servant for the hope of Buddhism has to be decided.

Thus, definitely, Ambedkar has thought about the role of Buddhist dialogue in dealing with the other when he goes for a dialogue. Incidentally, as Buddha has inculcated Buddhism in the Indian context, Ambedkar too adopted such method as could be seen from his "Buddha Puja Paat".

Ambedkar's Dialogue with Hindu and Buddhist Religions

After Buddha, definitely, Ambedkar can be taken as a role-model for dialoguer, as none other would have suffered, experienced and enjoyed the fruits of such dialogue, till he turned to Buddhism in 1956 with conviction. That he has chosen Buddhism leaving other western religions proves that he has thought deeply on the consequential effects in India and abroad, as his act was bound to create social and religious impact. Thus, his peaceful conversion has been for peace process initiated tactfully in his inter-religious dialogue and inculcation.

Intra-religious Dialogue Required before Inter-religious Dialogue for Peace Processes

That each God-believing and God-denying religion or faith has been divided into factions and denominations proves the much existence of ego, claim of superiority and lack of mutual respect. That in the name of the same God or Prophet or Ideologue, two or three or more believers have been fighting with and killing each other proves the hypocrisy of the believers. After 9/11 (2001), many dialoguers have started discussing about the extremities of

the usage of dialogue for their theological purposes¹². Of course, the justification of a nuclear war for ending the world, so that the Kingdom of God could be established immediately and thus the “Second coming” is hastened had been there already¹³. As moderates and extremists exist in superiority claiming religions through intra-religious dialogue, the extremists have to be convinced, controlled and checked. The moderates then can go for Inter-religious dialogue with consensus, mutual respect and aimed or determined goals.

Achieving World Peace through Dialogue

At many places on the globe, religion plays a crucial role in bringing peace or war. The geostrategic aspects of the encounters and conflicts or religious cultures and the civilizations have been identified and monitored. That Huntington’s theory¹⁴ would be effectively working is intriguing, as before 11-09-2001, the UN declared the year 2001 as the International Year of Dialogue among the Civilizations¹⁵. The International Congress on Interreligious Dialogue was held at Tashkent in September 2000. The International round Table “Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue as a Part of the Dialogue among Civilizations” was organized by the UNESCO Division of Intercultural Dialogue and National Commission of the Kyrgyz Republic for UNESCO in Bishkek, June 25-26, 2001. Many efforts were / are being taken to curtail terrorism and hence the stress on non-violence and connected principles are promoted. Here, the meditation, yoga, vegetarian food, Ayurveda and such other principles and practices also come in. Thus, promoting such ideas would bring good thoughts to the violators of peace and they may think twice before plant, set and explode next bomb amidst innocents. However, none has initiated any dialogue with terrorists!

Buddhist-Christian Dialogue for Peace

The Christian dialogue with Buddhism has been very old, as the origin of Christianity is traced back to Buddhism, because of many similarities and parallels found¹⁶. However, the Buddhist dialogue with Christianity is of recent origin. Many such dialogues

have been well recorded in the modern context¹⁷. As many Buddhist youth are attracted towards Christianity through the westernization, the Buddhists initiated their dialogue processes with the Christians. Ajahn Buddhadasa's comments on Christianity have been interesting in the context¹⁸:

“He was critical of attempts by Christians to buy converts. One of his journals noted of Christian missionaries: “*If you buy our stupid ones, we'll get your smart ones.*” When a religion stoops so low as to use either force or bribes to gain converts, it loses the very people who see through such manipulation.”

Thus, it is evident that irreligious conversion would affect the society and nation and it is opposed, as it would affect the peace process also.

Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue for Peace

Globally placed Muslims and Buddhists have regular interactions at different levels¹⁹. The Muslim dialogue with the Buddhism has been historically significant, as Muslims had to face the Buddhists who had been spread up to Africa in their formative period.

- i. Islamic scholars have asserted that the Prophet Dhu'l Kifl – the “man from Kifl” – mentioned twice in the *Quran* (21.85 and 38.48) refers to Buddha, with Kifl being the Arabic rendering of the name of Buddha's native kingdom, Kapilavastu. The *Quranic* mention of the fig tree (95.1-5), they continued, refers to the bodhi tree under which Buddha manifested his enlightenment. The *Quran* states that the followers of Dhu'l Kifl are righteous people.
- ii. The Islamic scholars- al-Biruni and al-Shahristan, who visited India in the 11th and 12th centuries CE respectively and wrote about its religions, referred to Buddha a “Prophet,” in the context of explaining how the Indians regarded Buddha.

- iii. Kashmiri Muslims who settled in Tibet from the seventeenth century CE married Tibetan Buddhist women within the context of Islamic law.
- iv. Comparison²⁰ is made between Buddha Maitreya, the Loving or Merciful One, with the Prophet Mohammed as the servant of the Merciful One.

Moreover, colossal Buddhist statues²¹ and sculptures have been dominant in these areas – north-west India, middle-east and up to African countries. A Buddhist sculpture is found in the temple of Luxor²². Thus, the Buddhist influence on Islam has been as significant as found in Christianity. However, Buddhism suffered heavily by Islam twice, perhaps, during the 8th to 14th centuries and now in 21st century. Thus, now Buddhists have initiated dialogue with Islam.²³

The Psychology of Violence and Non-violence

Violence and aggression are two faces of brute that is grown with hardened hatred, conditioned contempt and acrimonious animosity against targeted people and their symbols. Such attitude and behaviour do not come to any personality, unless they are taught, nurtured and developed since childhood or at later date with definite indoctrination. *Violence is, any action initiated with intention to hurt or injure other physically or psychologically and thus, the most immoral crime committed creating disturbance among people groups, outraging all social norms and decency leading to injustice inflicted on humanity.* The intensity of brutality, savagery and severity of violence has been the outcome of trained, brainwashed and conditioned minds. That too, when it is conceived, nurtured, implemented and perpetuated in the name of God, religion and scripture, it is the most inexplicable heinous offense against human beings. Again, when it is launched against meek, mild and innocent people, it is the worst form of barbarity to the core.

Thus the psychology of violence unmasks the mindset of the believer who wages holy war or jihad against the so-called non-believers by calling names from their dictionary of theology. It

exposes as to how the cruelty of God is transferred, transplanted and acted through the equally cruel believers and followers of him. It reveals the scriptural sanction of violence in the name of spreading the Word of God or Good News to everybody with a view to destroying all that belonged to non-believers, infidels or kafirs as decided by them. *Theological violence and faithful aggression perpetrated with scriptural sanction and assumed divine inspiration cross all psychological barriers leading to calculated lootings, burning scriptures, orchestrated iconoclasm, dogmatic demolitions, artistic vandalism, neurotic incendiaryism, beastly molestations, blood curling infanticides and inhuman genocide.* But the indulging warriors cannot wipe out everything as they think, because they too know very well that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. However, history tells how the Mayans, Incas and Aztecs were totally exterminated with their civilizations almost breaking down with their structures and cities. In extreme cases, they became frustrated and tried to take over, modify or superimpose the existing things with external embellishment.

Physical violence and verbal violence had been the part of these crusaders depending upon the people groups and places where they were operating. In fact, the verbal violence had been the worst form than the physical violence. On the other hand, the psychology of non-violence is gentleness, lenience and mildness nature of man inculcated with tenderness, grace and tolerance. It is not preached, but followed and practiced in thought and action. It spreads goodwill, peace and happiness on the earth, embraces all with love and compassion and unifies to Cosmos for eternity. Thus, *non-violence can be defined as the refined and conditioned mental status of non-allowance of any thinking that may cause or likely to cause physical or psychological injury to any other living things, including human-beings.* Its main characteristic is self-suffering and suffering for others. Getting slapping on both cheeks, bearing all beatings, receiving blows, accepting punches and withstanding lashes without raising a hand against. Without understanding the significance, the aggressors may exploit the

condition of such people, but in long run, they are the losers and the sufferers but not the victors.

Conclusion

In view of the above discussion, it is evident that the Buddhist attempt of having dialogue with other religions in the global context has been very significant. Being a non-theocratic religion, its importance in bringing about a peaceful for co-existence is felt by others. The dialoguers are expected to be honest enough to have fair, just and reasonable in having “dialogue” with other believers, as a dialogue cannot be dialogued, if the persons with whom the person has dialogued do not know about such dialogue.

If believers of Gods abuse Gods, seekers of Gods destroy Gods, faithful followers of one religion question the faith of others and, against all moral and ethical codes and Universal principles. They conduct pseudo-spiritual and psychological-religious warfare against one religion, and then these activities are not “inculturation” but “outculturation,” as religion and culture are inseparable for Hindus.

Theocentric and theocratic eclectics are dangerous as nuclear, chemical and other warheads. The concept of “My God is your God, but your God is no God” does not foster understanding, co-operation and goodwill. The concept should be changed to “Your God is my God and my God is your God” and accepted by all religions²⁴.

This is the only way for humanity today. Super God Rivalry, religious superiority, racial / arrogant theology, theocratic world domination and neo-spiritual globalism cannot make “believers” live in peaceful existence. Therefore, the behaviour, attitude and psyche of the inter-religious theologians should change making a “dialogue,” a “dialogue” but not a secret “monologue” to undermine, disparage and denigrate other Gods, scriptures and religions. Historical facts, established parallels after borrowings and chronological developments and changes should be mentioned clearly. They should clearly spell out their purpose of dialogue and standards before initiating dialogues.

References

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Christian	1.95 billion	New religious movements	128 million
Muslim	1.00 billion	Indigenous religions	99 million
Hindu	777 million	Jewish	14 million
Buddhist	341 million	Affiliated to no religion	1.1 billion
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15. <http://www.un.org/documents/dialogue.htm>
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18. Sanrikuaro, *Ajahn Buddhadasa and Inter-religious Understanding*,
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20. Alexander Berzin, *Introduction to Buddhism from an Islamic Point of View, Buddhism and Its Impact on Asia. Asian Monographs*, no. 8. Cairo: Cairo University, Center for Asian Studies, June 1996.
http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/study/islam/general/buddhist_islamic_view.html
21. The statue were constructed in the 6th cent.CE by the Kushanas (?) but destroyed by the Talibans in March 2001, as they were against the Shariat Law.

22. One group of people *Therapeutae* sent by Asoka on an embassy to Pharaoh Ptolemy II in 250 BC were considered as Buddhists. **The word 'Therapeutae' is itself of Buddhist origin, being a Hellenization of the Pali 'Thera-putta'** (literally 'son of the elder'). Philo Judaeus, contemporary of Josephus, described the *Therapeutae* in his tract '*De Vita Contemplativa*'. They were a religious brotherhood of reclusive ascetics, devoted to poverty, celibacy, good deeds and compassion, just like Buddhist monks. Thus, they were considered as *the Essences* (a similar monkish order in Palestine) and the *Gnostics*—adepts of philosophical speculations.
23. Alexander Berzin, *Islamic-Buddhist Dialogue*, November 1995, revised November 2006. For details, see at:
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